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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
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TO: Deputy Director (Intelligence)

SUBJECT: The Problem of India's Next Prime Minister

Jawaharlal Nehru's recent resignation as President of the Congress Party and reports that he may shortly resign as prime minister have heightened interest in his probable successor. Morarji Desai, chief minister of Bombay, who accepts Nehru's political and economic philosophy, would probably be Nehru's first choice. Desai would be opposed by the conservative faction of the Congress Party, however, and at the moment this faction seems strong enough to force a compromise. The most likely compromise candidate is Rajendra Prasad, now president of India.

In choosing a new prime minister, Nehru or the Congress Party would almost certainly seek a Hindu from either Uttar Pradesh or Bombay state, since a Moslem would be unacceptable and the big majority of present government and party leaders come from those two states. Preferably, the candidate should not be over 65 at the time of appointment and should have some stature as a leader in the fight against the British for independence.

Possible Candidates in the Government

Within the government, serious consideration would probably be given only to members of Nehru's cabinet and to the chief ministers of the states, who represent the real sources of political power in India. The Indian diplomatic corps is composed almost exclusively of comparative unknowns or career civil servants. Only B. G. Kher, age 66, until recently Indian high commissioner in London, has the desired requisites. Since he recently was reported to have refused the presidency of the Congress Party, he may be uninterested in the premiership.

Of the governors, rajpramukhs (or ex-princes), lieutenant governors, and chief commissioners of the Indian states and territories, only the governors' ranks hold any likely candidate. The Indian government is committed to the extinction of the rajpramukhs as a class, and the others would be

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disqualified on the basis of youth, obscurity, or non-political background. Even among the governors, the choice is limited, since most are either civil administrators or superannuated Congress Party workhorses "put out to pasture" in marginal or politically "safe" states. Girja Shankar Bajpai, 63 years old, of Bombay and Sri Prakasa, 64, of Madras are the only two who would merit much consideration, and neither seems a promising candidate.

Among the chief ministers, only three have national stature. These are G. V. Pant of Uttar Pradesh, age 67; Morarji Desai of Bombay, age 58; and the 72-year-old Dr. B. C. Roy of West Bengal. Both Pant and Roy might be ruled out by Congress leaders because of their age, and Roy is particularly badly needed in his present position.

The members of Nehru's cabinet, together with supporting ministers and deputy ministers, provide few more possible choices. Most deputy ministers are under 50 and are politically obscure. The six ministers who are not members of the cabinet are also in their 50's and somewhat young to obtain universal respect. Though their names appear fairly often in the Indian press, they seem to play a definitely supporting and administrative role and are not outstanding political figures. 25X6

25X6 The 11 male members of Nehru's cabinet, aside from himself, include seven who are essentially political nonentities. More powerful are Education Minister Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, age 65; Home Minister K. N. Katju, age 67, and Commerce Minister T. T. Krishnamachari, age 55. The only first-class power left since the recent death of Food Minister Kidwai, however, is Finance Minister Chintaman Deshmukh, age 58. He is a superb technician and an important policy maker, but he has no political ambitions and is unlikely to be given leadership of the cabinet.

Possible Candidates in the Congress Party

Information on the Congress Party hierarchy outside the government is surprisingly scanty. Nothing is known about the membership of Pradesh Congress Committees, which represent party leadership at the provincial level. A list of the presidents of these committees is also unenlightening. 25X1

With very few exceptions, however, it appears that their reputations are purely local, and many of these men are outshone by other politicians in their own areas. It seems certain that none would be named to the premiership without prior experience in intermediate posts. The next level of the Congress organization, the All-India Congress Committee of 200-odd members, is also almost completely unknown.

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The Congress Working Committee, the highest policy-making body of the party, is better known. It is composed of two groups, the first of which consists primarily of presidents of provincial Congress committees and general secretaries of the party. They represent mainly provincial interests and seldom remain in office for more than one to three years.

The second group consists of individuals of considerably greater stature, whose membership is usually of longer standing, and who presumably furnish continuity in committee thinking and leadership. This second group now includes cabinet members Nehru and Azad and chief ministers Desai, Pant, and Roy. One other aged but influential committee member is C. Rajagopalachari, first governor general of India and powerful moderate leader, now retired from public office.

All these men except Rajagopalachari are among the strongest members both of the party and the government structure. Since the Working Committee controls the party and the party controls the government, it is probably accurate to state that the individuals who are important members of both actually direct the destiny of India. Chief among these are Nehru, Azad, Desai, Pant and Roy.

Nehru's Probable Choice

Since Azad is a Moslem and Pant and Roy are both relatively old, Morarji Desai seems the most logical man for Nehru to choose as his successor. Desai represents the second most important of the four major states of India. He is incorruptible, a strong administrator, an ardent nationalist, a puritanical Gandhite, and is devoted to secular government. There is a good chance of his at least temporarily establishing himself in office under the protection of Nehru and Rajendra Prasad, the president of India.

Anticipated Opposition to Nehru's Choice

On the other hand, strong conservative and business interests, who provide the largest proportion of the Congress Party funds and services, oppose Desai on the grounds of his puritanism and his efforts to oust English from the state school curriculum. They also feel that a man who has never been outside India is ill-qualified to handle the problems of world politics. Furthermore, they are opposed to the principles of the welfare state and the development of cottage industries, to both of which Nehru and the Congress Party are now committed.

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It is impossible to assess with accuracy the present political strength of the Congress conservatives, though conservative strength appears to have grown during the past year. It also seems that the conservatives have no outstanding candidate to offer as an alternative to Desai. They may therefore have to confine themselves to objecting to a candidate chosen by others. In that event, the strong rightist cabinet group of C. D. Deshmukh, K. N. Katju, and T. T. Krishnamachari, possibly backed by others, may be able to force the choice of a compromise candidate.

Compromise Candidates

At the moment, a compromise seems the most likely outcome of the situation expected to develop when Nehru dies or retires. The prime minister would be appointed on a caretaker basis, until the probable struggle for power between Congress liberals and conservatives is resolved.

There is no outstanding candidate within the preferable age limits, and the choice is likely to be made from among India's most prominent elder statesmen. First among these is the 70-year-old Rajendra Prasad, one of the most widely respected men in the country. He could probably be persuaded to depart from the presidency, leaving Vice President Radhakrishnan, a highly revered scholar, as the head of state. Prasad could probably do more to maintain stability than any other individual in India.

As an alternative, 75-year-old C. Rajagopalachari of Madras might become prime minister. Renowned as one of India's cleverest and most respected leaders, Rajagopalachari would be only a second choice, however, because of his extreme age and his record of occasional disagreement with the Congress high command.

No other choice equally acceptable to both the liberals and the conservatives is immediately apparent.

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